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DHHS Welcomes LIHEAP Audit by Legislature's  
Performance Audit Committee

**Lincoln** - The Department of Health and Human Services welcomes an audit of the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program by the Legislature's Performance Audit Committee, said CEO Kerry Winterer in response to a letter sent by the Auditor of Public Accounts to Sen. John Harms, chairman of the committee.

"We invite the Performance Audit Committee to examine LIHEAP," he said. "We've found that office to be professional, thorough and fair in their reviews and we welcome them to audit the program."

Winterer disagreed with the State Auditor's statement in the letter that DHHS personnel "have a serious lack of understanding of the federal and state regulations." He said more staff has been dedicated to work with the LIHEAP grant, and issues most recently mentioned by the State Auditor dealt with establishing better internal communications and controls rather than not understanding regulations. The issue of internal controls has been reviewed and corrected for future years.

"It appears there is a philosophical difference between the auditor and DHHS about federal money," Winterer said. "The Auditor seems to be saying if we have additional federal dollars, we should spend them now without considering the longer-term consequences."

Changing the state plan in this situation, he said, means DHHS would give considerably more money to people already receiving benefits, or more people with higher incomes would be eligible for benefits.

"Clearly, the Auditor's call to change the LIHEAP state plan eligibility requirements to expend funds is an expansion of the program," Winterer said. "If we were to expand eligibility for LIHEAP just to expend these dollars, we may receive a smaller amount the next year. Then, funds may not be available for all

recipients that year.”

“The unused \$5.8 million in LIHEAP funds that will be retained by the federal government are taxpayer dollars, and as good stewards of the public’s money, they always should be handled with that in mind,” he said.

“We are open to the findings of auditors that will improve how DHHS performs its business,” Winterer said. “And, if the Legislature’s auditors identify efficiencies that can be achieved, we welcome that, too. Our goal is to do our best to make sure funds are provided to those who are eligible for them and taxpayers’ dollars are used effectively according to the established policies of the state.”